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THE CORPUS CHRISTI PROCESSION AND THE CORPUS CHRISTI PLAY

The following article was begun as a review of Dr. M. Lyle Spencer's *Corpus Christi Pageants in England*, New York, 1911. It devotes itself, however, to a discussion of some of the points arising out of the perusal of the earlier chapters of Dr. Spencer's book and not to the possibly more profitable end of reviewing the book itself. There can be no question of the value of Dr. Spencer's study as a whole, and, particularly, I think, of his chapters on pageants, staging and Corpus Christi conventions, which seem to me to be unusually sound and valuable.

It is now pretty generally agreed that the English religious plays grew from their liturgical origins on English soil and were not translated from the French.¹ The older view, (Warton, *History of English Poetry*, i., 248; Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described*, 201 ff.; Ten Brink, *History of English Literature*, ii., 1, 237 *et passim*; Ward, *English Dramatic Literature*, i., 9 ff., 76 ff.) which believed in special authorship and foreign originals, was based upon the well-known Chester tradition pointing to the year 1328 as the year of translation and to Randall Higdon, who was "thrice at Rome before he could have leave of the Pope to have them in the English tongue", as the translator.² Another entry pointing the same way is the altogether impossible one from the Coventry manuscript Annals where it states that the plays were invented in 1416. Translation from the French is now disallowed except, possibly, for the Chester Plays where the parallel with the *Mystère du Viel Testament* and other French plays is obvious,

¹ Chambers, *The Mediæval Stage*, vol. ii., pp. 108, 146-7; Creizenach, *Geschichte des neueren Dramas* (new edition), i., 187 ff., 359 ff.; Davidson, *Studies in the English Mystery Plays*, 171 *et passim*; Schelling, *The Elizabethan Drama*, i., 12 ff.

² Morris, *Chester in Tudor and Plantagenet Times*, 317; Furnivall, *The Digby Plays*, quotations from the Breviary of Chester, p. xviii. ff.; and especially Chambers, ii., 348 ff., where so much has been done to render the confused traditions intelligible.

but even there actual translation is not probable.³ It is far more likely that we have back of this parallelism a somewhat extensive Latin play. I have suggested that the corrupt and imperfect Benedictbeuern Christmas play is of the same type and composition as one of the forerunners of the Chester plays.⁴ The French employed in the Chester cycle and others does not point to a French original, but to its deliberate use on the part of the writers of the plays with intent to caricature persons of high estate; such as Pilate and Herod. England had the same liturgical inheritance as had France, Germany, and Italy; but, allowing for that, the dramas preserved are surprisingly national, or rather local, in their characteristics. They passed from Latin to English by a method of repeating and amplifying the Latin texts in the vernacular. There are examples of this in the religious dramas of all countries.⁵

Another matter that has been emerging into clearness is that the Corpus Christi play, as we know it in the four full cycles, the fragments of lost cycles and in the records, occupied a comparatively restricted area and was a separate dramatic form with certain definite characteristics. Corpus Christi plays seem to have belonged mainly to the north and east of England. There were plays of the Corpus Christi type at Newcastle, Kendal, Preston, Beverley, York, Chester, Lincoln, Louth, Norwich, Ipswich, Coventry, Worcester; and more doubtfully, at about as many more places. There was a procession and, almost certainly plays also, at Dublin; and also, no doubt, at some places in Scotland. Corpus Christi plays are by no means the only plays on biblical subjects in England. In fact dramatic activities were much more varied than the current histories of the religious drama indicate.

³ H. Ungemacht, *Die Quellen der fünf ersten Chester Plays*; Hemingway, *English Nativity Plays*, pp. xxiv ff., 217 ff. To the parallels pointed out by these writers add also the very significant one of the Balaam play in the *Mystère*, which follows, as at Chester, immediately after the scene of Moses and the Tables of the Law.

⁴ *The Origin of the Old Testament Plays*, *Modern Philology*, x., 486-7.

⁵ Chambers, ii., 69 ff.; Creizenach, i., 100 ff. See a particularly good example of this transitional stage in the Shrewsbury Fragments, Manly, *Specimens of the Pre-Shakspearean Drama*, i., pp. xxvii ff.

The histories are based upon the records of the Corpus Christi plays, which are many times more numerous and extensive than the records of other plays.

In order to arrive at some sort of classification of the plays on religious subjects, it is necessary to recognize the Corpus Christi plays as a separate class.

First of all, in the matter of terminology, "Corpus Christi play" is used dozens of times, and used discriminately to denote the type of play we have in mind. Consider a few of the more familiar references:

Heywood, *The Foure PP.* 831:

"Oft in the play of Corpus Cristi
He had played the deuyll at Couentre."

The *C Mery Talys*, lvi:

"Yf you beleue not me, then for a more suerte and suffcient auctoryte, go your way to Couentre, and there ye shal se them all playd in Corpus Christi playe."

Newcastle-on-Tyne, fifteenth century craft ordinaries.*

"Whensoeuer the generall plaies of the town of Newcastle, antiently called the Corpus Christi plays, shall be plaied, etc."

Weever's *Funeral Monuments*, Folio, p. 405:†

"Richard Marlow was Lord Maior [of London] in 1409 in whose Maioraltie there was a play at Skinners Hall, which lasted eight dayes (saith Stow) to heare which most of the greatest Estates of England were present. The subject of the sacred Scriptures, from the creation of the World: They call this Corpus Christi Play in my countrey which I have seene acted at Preston, and Lancaster, and last of all at Kendall, in the beginning of the raigne of King James; for which the Towns-men were sore troubled; and upon good reasons the play finally suppressed, not onely there, but in all other Townes of the Kingdome."

Weever was from the north and was born in Lancashire in 1576. He wrote about 1631, and he seems to recognize that the Corpus Christi play was a northern rather than a southern institution.

So definite was the term that even when, as at some places, the play was no longer acted as Corpus Christi, it was still referred to as a Corpus Christi play. At Chester, where the plays were acted at Whitsuntide, the Bakers' Charter in 1462 speaks of the "play and light of Corpus Christi;" the Saddlers' Charter in 1471 of "paginae luminis et ludi Corporis Christi." These references may or may not be after the transference of the plays to Whitsuntide, but references of

* Quoted by Chambers, ii., 385.

† Quotation derived from Sharpe, *Dissertation*, 133.

the sixteenth century make it clear that they were always known by their old name. The "White Book" about 1544 speaks of "pagyns in the play of Corpus Xpi."⁸ From Norwich, where likewise the plays were at Whitsuntide, comes the jocular reference by J. Whetley in a letter to Sir John Paston⁹ of Lord Suffolk how "ther was never no man that playd Herrod in Corpus Christy play better and more agreable to hys pageaunt than he did." Finally, there is an entry from Lincoln at the time of the Marian reaction. The Corporation Register for July 6, 1554, contains this entry: "Agreed at a Secret Council that St. Anne's guild with Corpus Christi play shall be brought forth and played this year, and that every craft shall bring forth their pageants as it hath been accustomed, and all occupations shall be contributory as shall be assessed."¹⁰ This is an obvious association of the Lincoln Corpus Christi play with the St. Anne's day procession, an association possible also from the content and nature of the latter play as revealed by various records.¹¹

On the other hand, where the plays were of another kind, they seem to have been called by other names. At New Romney in Kent¹² there is mention of a "Resurrection" play in 1456 and a "play of the Interlude of our Lord's Passion" in 1463. It was a stationary play of considerable extent, and the circumstances of its representation lead one to conclude that it was of the type familiar in the passion plays of the continent. There was much dramatic activity in that part of England, and the free interchange of performances among the towns leads one to think that they must have had stationary plays and not cyclic Corpus Christi plays. At Aberdeen, where the passion group and the nativity group were not united, the passion, which was performed at Corpus Christi day, was called the "Haliblude play." Similarly, at

⁸ Chambers, ii., 348 ff.

⁹ *Paston Letters*, ed. Gardiner, iii., 227.

¹⁰ Hist. MSS. xiv., 8, 47.

¹¹ See Hist. MSS. as above pp. 25-58; also A. F. Leach, *Some English Plays and Players* in the Furnivall Miscellany, pp. 222-228, and Chambers, ii., 377 ff.

¹² Hist. MSS., v., 533.

Leicester there is mention in 1477 in the Hall book of the Corporation of a "passion play" with no ground for connecting it with Corpus Christi, though unfortunately details which might define it more closely are lacking. There is also the example of the Cornish *Creation, Passion and Resurrection* which is not a Corpus Christi play. Finally, there are a few small pieces of evidence to show that the plays of London were possibly of the same general form as the Cornish plays; they were certainly not Corpus Christi plays. I refer to the record in the Issue Roll of the Exchequer for Easter to Michaelmas, 1391, of a payment to "the Clerkes of the Parish Churches and to divers other clerkes of the City of London", as a gift from the king, "on account of the play of the Passion of our Lord and the Creation of the World by them performed at Skynner Well, after the Feast of Bartholomew last past." The entry of 1391 in Malvern's continuation of Higden's *Polychronicon*, with which Chambers connects this payment, says merely, "Item xvij^o die Iulii clerici Londonienses fecerunt ludum satis curiosum apud Skynnereswell per dies quatuor duraturum, in quo tam vetus quam novum testamentum oculariter ludendo monstrabant." There is also the reference in Machyn to a "stage play at the Grey freers of the Passyon of Cryst" during the reign of Queen Mary in 1557.¹³ There were then at least two major types of cyclic plays, and a Corpus Christi play was a different kind of play from a passion play.

Besides these, every possible kind of religious play and stage of development was probably represented in England. Smaller towns and special communities presented a variety of dramatic forms, for the simpler stages did not disappear with the establishment of the great cycles. There were Resurrection plays at Bath (?), Kingston-on-Thames, Leconfield in Yorkshire, Leicester, Morebath in Devonshire, Magdalen College, Oxford, and possibly also at Reading, which last, however, may have been a part of a full cycle. Nativity plays were acted separately from resurrection plays at Aberdeen, as

¹³ On the whole matter of the London plays see Chambers, ii., 379 ff., and the references given there.

already pointed out, at Leconfield and at Leicester. There was possibly also a Christmas play of some sort at Lincoln. It is referred to in the Chapter *computi* in 1406, 1452 and 1531, according to Canon Wordsworth, (*Lincoln Statutes*, ii. lv) as follows: "In serothecis emptis pro Maria et Angelo et Prophetis ex consuetudine in Aurora Natalis Dni hoc anno."¹⁴ Chambers in the *Mediæval Stage*, volume ii, Appendix W, from which I have drawn the foregoing materials, gives references which indicate a variety of forms of the religious drama, and his list is by no means complete. The Digby plays are also a case in point, since you have there four plays none of which belongs to Corpus Christi cycles. The Massacre of the Innocents is a part of an elaborate Nativity cycle, and the Burial and Resurrection is apparently an independent resurrection play.

Corpus Christi plays were characterized, in the first place, by completeness of cyclical content. They extended from the Creation to Doomsday, and they included plays of the Nativity, as well as of the Passion and Resurrection. They seem all to have been acted by craft guilds, with local differences as at Norwich, and to have been, to a greater or less degree, under municipal control. The plays of the Corpus Christi type were probably all acted, as the name indicates, originally at Corpus Christitide, and it is natural to think that they came into existence in connection with the observance of the festival of Corpus Christi; but there is very little actual evidence to connect the plays, as is usually done, with the Corpus Christi procession.

The Corpus Christi festival, and with it the procession, made its way very quickly over England. It was reaffirmed in 1311, delayed for some years, and reissued by Pope John XXII in 1316 as part of the Canon Law. The papal decree

¹⁴ It is natural to connect with this an entry imperfectly given by the same author (C. Wordsworth, *Notes on the Mediæval Services in England*, 126.): "In 1421 tithes to the amount of 8s 8d were assigned to Thomas Chamberleyn for getting up a spectacle or pageant ('cuiusdam excellentis visus') called *Rubum quem viderat* at Christmas.

ordered not only the celebration of the festival of Corpus Christi but an attendant procession. The festival was declared a principal feast of Canterbury in 1317, and there is mention of special services appointed for the festival. (Hist. MSS. Eighth Report, vii., 321.) There is another significant entry in *Historia Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*,¹⁵ where you have: "Nota de festivitate Corporis Christi (1318). Anno Domini Millesimo trecentesimo decimo octavo incoepit festivitas de Corpore Christi generaliter celebrari per totam ecclesiam Anglicanam." The same immediacy of its introduction into England is borne out by the reference to Sprott's *Chronicles* which states that the festival was a confirmed institution in England by the year 1318.¹⁶ In considering the processional feature of the Corpus Christi festival, it is important to note the wide latitude allowed each diocese or parish as to the extent and manner of the procession. A Council at Paris in 1323 speaks of it in these words: "As to the solemn procession made on the Thursday's feast, when the Holy Sacrament is carried, seeing that it appears to have been introduced in these our times, by a sort of inspiration, we prescribe nothing at present and leave all concerning it to the devotion of the clergy and the people."¹⁷

At Ipswich the Gild Merchant was reconstituted as a Gild of Corpus Christi in 1325, and the Constitution provides for a procession on Corpus Christi day.¹⁸ At London the fraternity of Skinners had a procession once every year on Corpus Christi day afternoon; this guild dates from 1327.¹⁹ The Tailors' Gild of Lincoln, founded in 1328, had a pro-

¹⁵ Rolls Series, *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages*, ii., 44.

¹⁶ Mr. M. Lyle Spencer, *Corpus Christi Pageants in England* page 11, cites Sprott but gives no further information as to the introduction of the festival into England. I owe the two important citations given above to a University of Minnesota unpublished Master's thesis on the *Origin and Theological Significance of the Corpus Christi Festival* by Mr. Paul E. Kretzmann.

¹⁷ Gueranger, *The Liturgical Year*, vol. vii., part 1, p. 287 ff.

¹⁸ Hist. MSS. ix., 1, 245.

¹⁹ Stow, *Survey of London*, 87.

cession of the brethren and sisters on the feast of Corpus Christi. Similarly there are records of processions at Coventry in 1348.²⁰ Leicester in 1349-50,²¹ Beverley between 1330 and 1350.²²

The earlier part of the fourteenth century, after 1318, would be the probable time for the invention of the Corpus Christi play, if it arose definitely in connection with the observance of Corpus Christi day. The earliest records of Corpus Christi plays are from Beverley in 1377, where in 1390 they are spoken of as "antiqua consuetudo"; from York in 1378, where in 1394 the pageants are to play at places "antiquatus assignatis"; from Coventry in 1392, and others in the early fifteenth century.²³ We may fairly take the Cambridge reference of about 1350 to a certain William de Lenne and his wife who joined the gild of Corpus Christi and spent a mark "in ludo filiorum Israelis", as partly bridging the long gap from the traditional date of 1328 at Chester to the earliest Beverley record in 1377. In that case we should understand the "ludum filiorum Israelis" as being a play of the Slaughter of the Innocents, and therefore, an ordinary member of a Corpus Christi cycle. The play of the sons of Jacob, which Creizenach takes this to mean, is otherwise unknown in England, and the play of the Slaughter of the Innocents is several times called the Children of Israel.²⁴ A lost play on the subject at Beverley was so called; so also apparently a pageant in the Dublin procession; in the Norwich list the "Children of Israel" refers to Moses and his host in the Pharoah play. At any rate the Cambridge reference probably indicates a Corpus Christi play. The Chester tradition has been frequently discussed of late years, and the general effect has been to render it credible, as

²⁰ Smith, *English Gilds*, 182, 232.

²¹ W. Kelly, *Notices of the Drama*, 36.

²² A. F. Leach, *Beverley Town Documents*, p. ix.

²³ Chambers, ii., Appendix W.

²⁴ Chambers, ii., 344 and other entries in Appendix W; *Retrospective Review*, xii., 7 quoting Masters, *History of C. C. C. Cambridge*, i., 5; Creizenach, i., 69.

it certainly is on *a priori* grounds.²⁵ The paucity of records during the fourteenth century must be due to the fact that the plays had not yet emerged from parochial control; as they did so they became more and more affairs of municipal importance and were noted in the records of towns and cities.

There is no evidence that the plays had been combined into cycles before the early part of the fourteenth century. Such combinations had been made on the continent but probably not in England. The scanty records of the thirteenth century point to a condition where the plays were in their original groups. The Cathedral Statutes of Bishop Hugh de Nonant (1188-98) of Lichfield provide for *Pastores* at Christmas and Resurrection and *Peregrini* at Easter.²⁶ A thirteenth century continuation of the life of St. John of Beverley records a recent (about 1220) miracle wrought in the minster while the crowd was watching a performance of a play of the Resurrection beside the church.²⁷ The denunciations of plays by Grosseteste (1244) and other ecclesiastics of the century point to a close connection between the plays and the church itself. Denunciations grew less frequent and more specific after the plays became clearly secular.²⁸ The Statutes of York Cathedral about 1255 provide for *Pastores* and *Stella*.²⁹ The Shrewsbury Fragments may be a case in point, but it is impossible, with the information available, to tell anything about the date of the manuscript. It is of course believed on linguistic and metrical grounds that many of the plays go back to the thirteenth century. There is no evidence that the plays were written at the time of the establishment of the festival of Corpus Christi. They had for the most part been in existence long before that time. The invention of the cyclic play was also at least one hundred years old, and the idea was no doubt borrowed from the

²⁵ Chambers, ii., 348 ff.; S. B. Hemingway, *English Nativity Plays*, xix ff.; M. L. Spencer, *Corpus Christi Pageants in England*, 12 ff.

²⁶ Wordsworth, *Lincoln Statutes*, ii., 15, 23.

²⁷ *Historians of the Church of York*, i., 328, Rolls Series lxxi.

²⁸ H. S. Symmes, *Les Débats de la Critique dramatique en Angleterre*, 6-12.

²⁹ *Lincoln Statutes*, ii., 98.

continent; but not, I think, the actual form of the English Corpus Christi play; there are no extant parallels among the cyclic plays of the continent, although there are fairly close approximations. What seems to have been done was to transfer to Corpus Christi day and to arrange, in the extensive cyclic form, plays already of considerable development.

An indication of this special establishment is perhaps to be found in the subjects played by the various gilds in the cycles. The way they fit together seems to point to deliberate assignment. The bakers at Beverley, Chester and York played the Last Supper, probably because it seemed appropriate to some one for them to furnish bread; the cooks of Beverley and Chester played the Harrowing of Hell, because, we may suppose, they could handle fire; the watermen at Beverley and Chester, and the shipwrights of York and Newcastle played Noah's Ark for obvious reasons, and so on. It is pretty obvious from records at Coventry and Beverley and other places that a gild often played a play having to do with its patron saint. All these familiar facts indicate that, at one time in the history of the plays, there was a freedom to choose, or to be assigned a desirable or appropriate subject as a part in the cycle. The cases are so numerous as to preclude the possibility of their being the result of chance or gradual adaptation; they can hardly be the result of choosing in pre-cyclic times. The cases of Leicester in 1477, where there was a debate as to putting their passion play to the crafts, and Norwich in 1527, where the plays were shifted from St. Luke's gild to all the gilds, are both in point.

This set of circumstances, the general recognition of the play as a dramatic species, its cosmic form, its geographical location, its connection with the crafts, its complete establishment during the fourteenth century, so that by the end of the century it had become an ancient custom, together with the evidences that the parts of the play were still uncombined in the thirteenth century, to take the English records alone, constitute a fair ground for believing that the Corpus Christi play was invented about the end of the first quarter of the fourteenth century at some place probably in the north or

east of England, and spread thence to other places in the island. The same cycle was not borrowed, but other places constructed out of their own local plays similar cycles.

It yet remains to be asked why such an invention should have been suggested by the festival of Corpus Christi. There is nothing deliberately descriptive of the great cosmic theme either in the bull of Pope Urban IV., the order of the Council of Vienna, the confirmation of the decree in the Canon Law, or the service of Corpus Christi day, although they were all written with the idea that this service was theologically and ritualistically a consummation of the entire plan of salvation. Indeed the service may be said to portray the entire plan of salvation, culminating in sacrifice and everywhere conscious of the types of Christ among the patriarchs and of prophecy and its fulfillment. It is the same great story of the fall and redemption of man as that which we have in epics, sermons, commentaries, and cyclic plays both of the Corpus Christi type and the passion play type; it may almost be said to be the whole service of the year in miniature. There is not, however, any suggestion of historical sequence.

Since there was such latitude in the matter of the procession and since some of the plays are themselves processional, it has been suggested that the plays began as dumb-show pageants in the Corpus Christi procession and developed into drama from dumb-show, or had added to them the traditional materials from the already secularized liturgical plays.³⁰ There are some serious objections to this theory in either form. In the first place, it makes a mistake as to what the nature and purpose of the Corpus Christi procession was. It was a very much commoner thing than were the plays, and was entirely independent of them. This is interestingly illustrated by the substitution of the *Credo* play for the Corpus Christi play at York in 1535 and 1568 and of the *Pater Noster* for it in 1558 without apparently affecting the

³⁰ C. Davidson, *English Mystery Plays*; Creizenach, i., 169 ff.; Chambers, ii., 173 *et passim*; M. L. Spencer, *ut sup.*, 61 ff.

procession.³¹ A Corpus Christi procession was a march of ecclesiastics and laity, usually the whole body of citizens, through the streets of the city; it was part of a religious service and usually comprehended a return to the place of setting out. The citizens marched by crafts and in livery; and since they were themselves the spectators and actors of the plays, it is hard to see how plays could ever have been acted as part of the procession. It is doubtful, particularly in the earlier days of the procession, if the acting of plays would have been suitable or acceptable, even if it were possible to act them as the procession moved. There is none except very late evidence to connect the pageants with the Corpus Christi procession; they did not always appear in it, and if they did appear, it was not always in any very orderly way. The processional lists from Hereford and Dublin and the gear from the procession at Dundee are indications of defunct cycles rather than mimetic pageants about to develop into cycles.³² Moreover, the narrow, crooked streets of mediæval English towns would have made acting as the pageants moved a very impracticable thing both for actors and spectators.

More important still, a series of pageant tableaux on so extensive and so orderly a scale, as must have been, from its very beginning, every Corpus Christi play of which we have any record, could hardly have come into existence at all until after the community had been educated by familiarity with the plays. We should never have arrived at the uniform definite result that we have, Corpus Christi cycles with their general similarities, their local differences and their constant dependence upon their liturgical predecessors, if a beginning had been made from a set of ideally constructed pageant

³¹ Davies, *Municipal Records*, 256-8. An entry in the Corporation Register of Lincoln of December 31, 1521, indicates a similar independence on the part of the St. Anne's procession at Lincoln: "Every alderman to make a gown for the kings in the pageant on St. Anne's day, and the *Pater noster* play to be played this year." Hist. MSS., xiv., 8, 29. The Sacrament was carried in the St. Anne's procession and it seems to have been a Corpus Christi procession, although held on St. Anne's day.

³² Chambers, ii., App. W; M. L. Spencer, 71 ff.

tableaux. In other words, the particular set of subjects treated in the Corpus Christi plays are there, not because they were chosen to suit the idea of Corpus Christi, or because they were attractive in themselves, but because they were the liturgical themes handed down for centuries and ready to be combined into cycles for that occasion. The idea that a pageant antedates a play puts the cart before the horse. The ceremony at Beverley, recorded in 1355, connected with the feast of the Purification, and cited by Mr. Spencer as an example of a mimetic pageant,³³ is not necessarily dumb-show. The regular play on this subject must have had an independent existence for a long time. It has no fixed place in the cycles and shows evidence in every single case of being outside the parent cycle.

If we reduce a Corpus Christi cycle, say the Chester Whitsun plays, to its lowest terms, so to speak, and cut out from it every play which might by any chance be a later addition, or the result of development during the history of the cycle as a whole, as well as all useless homiletic materials, comicalities and excrescences, we yet have a drama of very considerable extent, perhaps one-third to one-half the whole, as it now stands; therefore, a drama that would require for its presentation, even at a very limited number of stations, a considerable amount of time. The Chester cycle would demand the treatment of the following topics: Fall of Lucifer, Creation, Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham and Isaac, *Processus*, Nativity with much special material, *Pastores*, *Stella*, Slaughter of the Innocents with Flight into Egypt, Temptation, Lazarus, Woman taken in Adultery (?), Entry, Conspiracy, Last Supper, Capture, Trial, Crucifixion, Death and Burial, Harrowing of Hell, Setting of the Watch, Resurrection, *Hortulanus*, *Peregrini*, Doubting Thomas, Ascension, Pentecost, Antechrist, Doomsday. No matter how briefly such topics were treated in the beginning, the skeleton itself is so extensive that it would have required a number of hours to present it. If we grant, for the purpose of getting the plays on the road, that the plays started out with the Corpus

³³ Smith, *English Gilds*, 149-50; M. L. Spencer, *Ioc. cit.*, 70 ff.

Christi procession, bearing in mind, however, that there is no evidence for it, and stopped at various places to act the scenes one after another, then it follows from the amount of time required, even from the first, that the Host, the clergy, the mayor and the city fathers must have preceded the gilds with their pageants; for otherwise they would have had to halt in the street at the first station for three or four hours.

Mr. Spencer states that in the earliest times the craftsmen led the procession and the ecclesiastics followed, but in this matter I think he has been misled.³⁴ The oldest and best case, that of Ipswich, is precisely the other way about.³⁵ So also at Beverley and York. Sharp states³⁶ that it seems reasonable to infer that the laity preceded the Host at Conventry; but it is not absolutely certain that this was the case, and if it was, it is the exception rather than the rule.

There were some places, where for all we know, the plays were just as ancient, in which the pageants were not carried about the streets, but the plays were acted on fixed stages. A connection with the Corpus Christi procession is not absolutely necessary to account for the processional idea. It is certain that the Corpus Christi play originated, not in dumb-show, but by the union of preëxistent plays, in cyclic combination for the most part, extensive in scope, long familiar to the people, and of native growth.

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³⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁵ His. MSS. ix., 8, 245.

³⁶ *Dissertation*, 125.